

WIC is Good for Families and the Economy

by Melissa Ross

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More than 1,000 pregnant women and new mothers received healthy nutrition support and education for their at-risk children in Lewis County last year thanks to the national Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program administered by Lewis County Public Health & Social Services (LCPHSS). A total of 3,846 women and children were served at LCPHSS in 2017.

The WIC mission is to assure healthy pregnancies, healthy birth outcomes, and healthy growth and development for women, infants, and children up to age five. Since the WIC program began in 1972, millions of at-risk children from pre-natal to age 5 have received a healthier start, and the lifelong benefits that follow good nutrition in those all-important formative years.

LCPHSS has provided WIC services to Lewis County since 1978. WIC staff members are credentialed and experienced to help families via these four core WIC services.

1. **Nutrition Education – learning to be healthy**
Parents are taught how to make healthy changes to their lifestyle through nutrition education. They learn to connect the dots between health, growth, and development for their children. LCPHSS conducted 8,878 nutrition education sessions and 1,057 registered dietitian appointments in 2017.
2. **Breastfeeding Promotion and Support**
Lactation specialists help break through barriers to breastfeeding, particularly among low-income women. National data shows that babies who are breastfed have reduced risk of disease and infection. Studies estimate that just these health benefits could save billions of dollars in healthcare costs every year if more babies were breastfed.
3. **Healthy Food – Fueling Healthy Growth and Development**
WIC families receive dietary guidelines and financial assistance to help them shop for healthy food. “Food Packages” are research-based lists of healthy food options for families to supplement their normal diets. A pregnant woman, postpartum mother, breastfed infant, formula-fed infant, or a young child would receive different packages tailored to meet their specific nutritional needs.
4. **Screening and Referrals – Bridging Important Health and Social Service Gaps**
In 2017 WIC staff provided 17,814 referrals or connections to other services such as prenatal or pediatric care, dental care, and social services. Through referrals, WIC connects families to primary and preventive health and social service resources they may not be aware of on their own.

In addition to helping families, WIC benefits are good for the local economy. WIC participants in Lewis County spent nearly \$1.5 million on food purchases with local merchants in 2017 alone. Another almost \$6,000 was spent on fresh fruits and vegetables at local Farmers’ Markets.

LCPHSS WIC services are available Monday through Friday at the Public Health Building, 360 NW North Street in downtown Chehalis. WIC staff also make monthly visits to Randle, Mossyrock, and Winlock. Families of all sizes and types may qualify for WIC. Call 360-740-1255 or 1-800-562-6130 ext. 1255. LCPHSS is an equal opportunity provider. The Washington State WIC Nutrition program does not discriminate.

WIC participation is associated with improved birth outcomes, better pediatric nutrition and healthcare, healthier lifestyle choices in Lewis County families, and setting kids up to lead productive lives. Call and see if WIC can improve your kids' lives, too.

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